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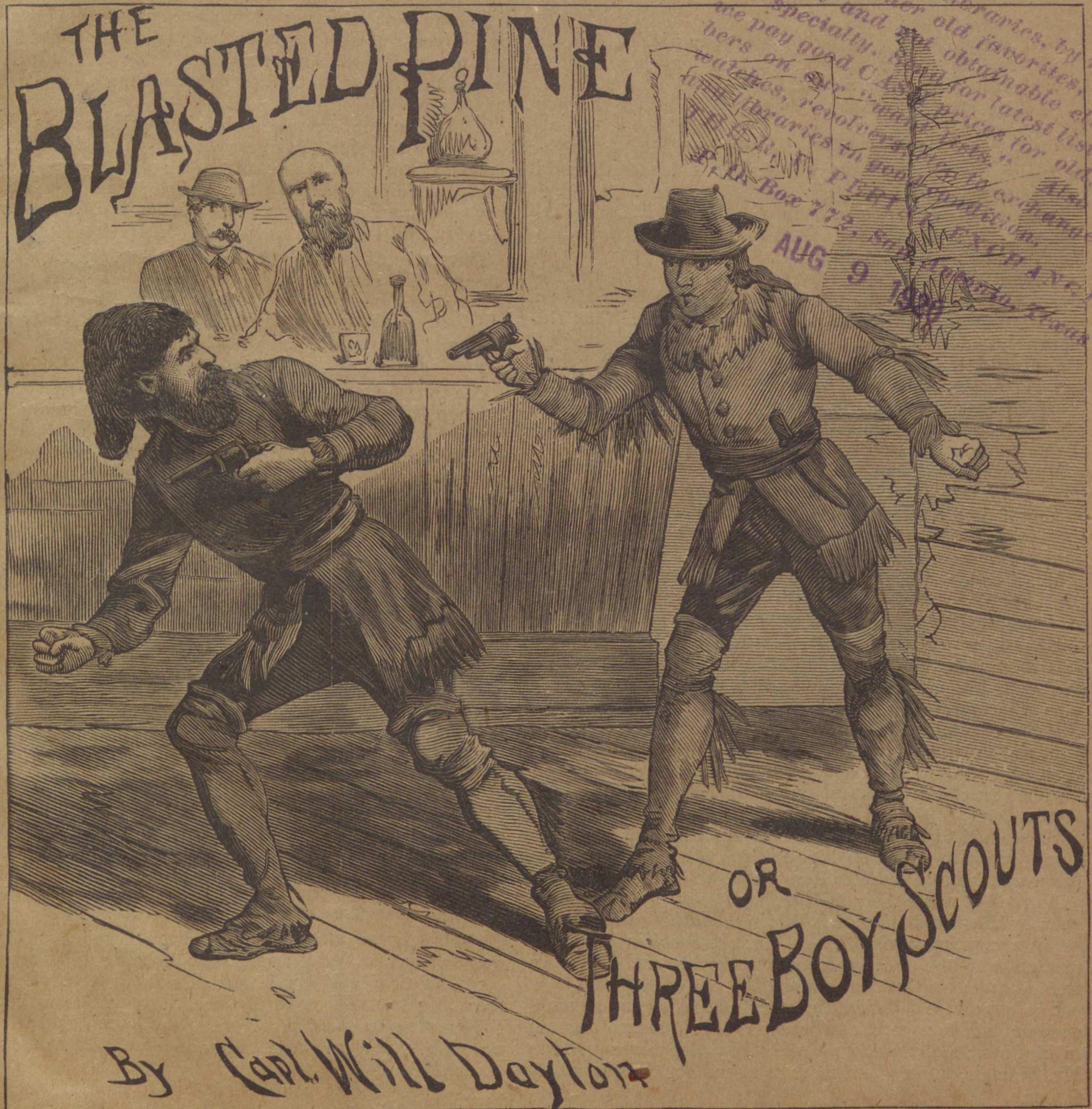
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THE BLASTED PINE;

OR,

THE THREE BOY SCOUTS.

By CAPTAIN WILL DAYTON.

CHAPTER I.

A STORY OF A BURIED TREASURE.

"TELL you what, Paul, we might as well go there on our vacation as anywhere."

"Certainly, Bert; whether we find it or not."

"We're sure to find it, boys; isn't the place marked out for us just as plain as on a chart? We can't miss it."

"You're sure you read it right, Les?" asked the boy called Paul.

"To be sure I did. There's too much to read altogether, 'cause it's not very plain now; but I reckon I could read that part plain enough."

Paul and Herbert Stuart were brothers, and Lester Arnold was their cousin and lived in the same house with them, his parents being dead.

At least they had been reported dead—slain by the Indians while crossing the plains, and as nothing had been seen of them for six years, it was safe to assume that the report had been correct.

Paul and Herbert had no father, but their mother had married again, and Mr. Sinclair, the step-father of the lads, was not particularly popular with the then boys, whose ages ranged from seventeen to nineteen; Bert being the youngest and Les coming between the two brothers.

Mrs. Stuart had had considerable property left her when her husband died, and Mr. Sinclair was by no means poor, although not as wealthy as his wife; and consequently, there were not wanting those who said he had married the young widow for her fortune.

Mr. Sinclair did not like the three boys, and Les was his particular aversion, although the lad never was rude or disrespectful, and was generally liked.

He did not see, said the step-father, why he should be burdened with the child of another man, and that man a person he had never seen or known, or had any dealings with whatever.

His wife reminded him that the boy was no burden to him, as she paid all his bills, gave him his regular allowance, and paid other expenses out of her own pocket, and that he (Sinclair) was at no expense whatever on Lester's account.

He seemed to begrudge the boy everything, for the more money his wife spent on him and the other boys, the less she would have to leave to him when she died.

As the boys and their mother, for Les always called his aunt by that fond title, not having seen his own mother since a very small child, were united, Sinclair was wise enough not to offend the boys too much, and therefore treated them civilly and no more.

The boys were satisfied, for their mother's company was good enough for them, and she was equal to two parents in kindness; and therefore while they were never rude to Mr. Sinclair, treated him more as a stranger than as a step-father.

The college term was just ending, and the long summer vacation was at hand, and it was in discussing the various plans for spending this that the boys were engaged when we introduced them to our readers.

Among a lot of papers which were supposed to have been the property of Lester's father, the lad found an old diary written by a scout, long since dead, named Hank Hunt; and in this, which he had not entirely read, Lester found many remarkable things.

That which interested the boy in particular was the account of a treasure—a large amount of gold and silver money, together with a quantity of gold dust and silver bricks, which the old man had buried at the foot of a solitary pine tree on a bleak hillside of the Indian country in the very midst of the Black Hills.

The account stated that the treasure, which was the savings and earnings of a life-time, had been secreted under the lone pine, for fear of its owner being robbed, and that he was only awaiting a fitting opportunity to dig it up and carry it away.

Toward the end of the diary, mention was again made of the lone pine tree, and the hidden treasure, the exact location being pointed out. The spot was not many miles from Deadwood—which had then, at the time this entry was written though not when the money was buried—just began to be heard of as a growing town, and the resort of all adventurous spirits.

The particular range was described near which this hill was to be found, and the tree itself was to be known by its being seen at so great a distance, its immense height, and certain marks made upon its trunk.

The money had not been disturbed, and as the writer was afraid he never could go for it, being old and feeble, he had been at great pains to describe its hiding-place so accurately, that any one with a knowledge of the country could go right to the spot and dig the treasure up for himself.

The writer went on to say that if he never recovered the money he would not mention it again in the book, and that if, by any mischance, he should lose it, or die before having regained his treasure, the money must be hunted for by the person into his hands the book fell, whether given by the owner, or found after his death.

The boys had been discussing what to do in the vacation, when Lester had fished up this old book and stumbled upon the story of the buried treasure.

"I'll tell you what let's do, boys," he said. "Suppose we go after that hidden gold that the book tells about?"

"All right," said Paul, the eldest of the three. "It's the thing to go West during vacation-time, and that's as good a place to go as anywhere. If we don't find the stuff we will have a first-rate time, anyhow, and that's what we want."

"But, you see, it would be tip-top to find it," was Bert's

answer; "for then we could have lots of more money to spend, and not have to call on Mr. Sinclair for any."

The boys never called their step-father anything except by the formal title that Herbert had given him, but as he did not act the part of a father toward the boys, it was not to be expected that they would call him by that name.

"We can't spend it, you know," spoke up Lester, "because the old hunter says it is to be taken to his old mother in St. Louis, or to his sisters."

"It's funny, that living in St. Louis ourselves we should never have heard of the old lady," said Paul.

"No, it isn't," replied Lester; "and besides, I never bothered to read that old journal until now, and so of course did not know anything about her. We can hunt her up."

"So we will, but we'll go after the treasure all the same."

"Certainly; we'll get a good guide, for you can't go up there without a guide, you know, and he'll tell you what sort of an outfit to get."

"And mother don't object, and Mr. Sinclair said it would be the best thing in the world for us," said Bert.

"I thought he would object to the expense," remarked Paul, "but he seemed to agree to the thing as soon as it was mentioned."

"Perhaps he wants to get rid of us and would like nothing better than to hear of our being scalped by the Indians," said Lester, with a laugh.

The words were said in jest, but Lester Arnold little knew what a world of truth there was in them.

CHAPTER II.

A SINGULAR LETTER, AND ITS ANSWER—THE BOYS HEAR BAD REPORTS OF THEIR GUIDE.

WHILE the boys were making ready to start out upon their trip to the mountains and prairies of the northwest, Mr. Sinclair wrote the following letter:

"St. LOUIS, Mo., June 1, 18—.

"To RICHARD PERCIVAL, Omaha, Nebraska:

"My three boys—confound them—are going off for a trip into the Black Hills. I refer them to you as a suitable guide. Take good care of them, and if any accident happens, be sure that your day of reckoning is not far off. Don't forget that they must be taken care of, for if anything should happen to them, I should feel dreadfully. Mind what I say, and if you make a good job of it, count on me for five hundred a-piece.

"SAMUEL SINCLAIR."

This letter seemed fair enough at first sight, or even upon being read a second time, although one might think that fifteen hundred dollars was a good price to pay for a guide's services.

Sinclair knew that Dick Percival would interpret the letter as he meant it should be read, but, for obvious reasons, he cloaked his meaning under words of caution.

What the letter really meant, and what Mr. Dick Percival, the scout, understood it to mean, was just this:

In case he took such excellent care of the three lads as to prevent any one of them returning alive to St. Louis, he was to receive fifteen hundred dollars, five hundred apiece.

In plain, unvarnished English, Mr. Sinclair meant to have his step-sons and their cousin got rid of, the means to be left to Mr. Dick Percival, scout.

He had reasons for wishing the boys out of the way, which we will speak of at greater length later on.

He knew Dick Percival to be a good scout and guide, and also a most unprincipled villain, who would do anything for money, from stealing a horse to murder, particularly if there was no chance of his being found out, but in any event, if enough money was offered him.

He preferred, of course, to take no risks, but risk or not, he would do anything bad if the sum was large enough.

Mr. Dick got the letter in due time, and wrote in reply that he would be most happy to take the young gentlemen into the Black Hills, and that he would take all the care of them that their fond parent could desire.

By this time the boys were all ready, and set out for Omaha in great spirits, promising to put themselves under the care of Dick Percival, and to do all he told them, trusting to his superior knowledge in everything.

They reached Omaha late one afternoon, and put up at a hotel, intending to acquaint the guide of their arrival early the next morning.

In the evening the boys determined to go out and see the sights, and the first place they dropped in at was a tavern frequented by hunters and scouts.

As they sat down they observed a raw-boned looking specimen of humanity standing at the bar, telling stories of border life.

"I tell ye what, lads," he was saying, "it knocked me clean off'n my pins when I lost my old chum, Hank Hunt, up thar in the wilds o' Minnesota—it did, fur a fack."

The boys became very much interested at hearing the name of the old hunter, and listened attentively to the speaker, resolving not to lose a single word.

"He was more edicated than me, a durned sight," continued the man, "an' I used tu wonder what made him go off scoutin'. When his mother an' sisters died o' the fever, he took on drefful, an' started wi' me off to the woods ag'in."

The old man and his relatives were dead, then, thought the boys. In that case the money would be the property of anyone who should succeed in finding it. That was worth knowing, at least.

"I think he was put out of the way by foul play," resumed the man, "an' I could e'en a'most sw'ar that Dick Percival done it. If I thort as how he did, I'd pop him over in a minnit; fur Hank war my best chum, though I'd on'y knowed him fur a year."

"Only knew him a year," whispered Lester. "Then he can't know anything about the buried treasure."

"Sh, let's hear what he's saying," said Paul.

"I knowed that Dick war up in them regions the same time we wuz, an' when I found poor old Hank's body in the bushes one mornin', I wur putty sure that no Injun hed done fur him. Twar a white man as hed wiped him out."

"Sure pop?" asked one of the bystanders.

"Sartain. They wuz a knife clust ter hand, an' that knife wur no Injun's, fur though it wur the same kind they use, it had the 'nitals 'R. P.' onto it, an' no Injun would have a name like that."

"Wull, what about it?"

"It struck me as the 'P' on that'ere handle stud for Percival, but the 'R' wuz what bothered me, fur that don't stan' fur Dick, you know. If it hed bin a 'D' now, I'd a' knowed it war Dick Percival's ter once."

"You don't know much, Dan'l," said the barkeeper, with a laugh.

"I know I don't. I said as how I never hed no l'arnin', but I know durn well that 'R' don't stan' fur Dick."

"But it stands fur Richard, and Richard and Dick is the same name, on'y Dick is the short way o' sayin' it."

"Is that so?" asked Dan'l, getting excited.

"You bet."

"You'll take yer dyin' oath onto it."

"To be sure; ax any o' the boys here if I ain't right."

Dan'l looked around, and presently his eye rested on the three boys.

"I'll ax them 'ere lads," he said. "They looks like educated lads, an' I guess I kin trust 'em. Look yer, boyees," he continued, coming over to them, "ye heerd what we wuz talkin' about?"

"Yes," answered Paul.

"Does R stan' fur Dick?"

"It stands for Richard, which is the book way of saying Dick."

"Then 'R. P.' stan's fur Dick Percival?"

"It might!" said Paul, who did not want to throw blame on the guide unless he deserved it.

"What do yer mean by that?"

"It might stand for any man's name: Robert Pratt, or Reuben Prime, or Richard Porter, for instance."

"So it mout, my lad, so it mout, but I'll bet a pint o' rum that it stan's fur Dick Percival, 'cause he war up thar, an' he had a grudge agin Hank, an' he's bad enough for anything. He'd strike his mother, he would. He has a bad name, he has, an' anybody kin tell ye so. Ain't he got a bad name, boyees?"

"Wull, I wouldn't want ter say so if he wuz 'round, onless I hed a grip onto my shootin'-iron," answered one of the men.

"Wull, I ain't afeerd o' him, an' ef I see him, I'll tell him he was the man what wiped out ole Hank, an' ef he can't show me as how he didn't, I'll scalp him, sure's my name's Dan'l. I tellee, he ain't the kind o' man to be trusted. He's wuss nor an Injun."

"That settles it, boys," said Lester, to his comrades. "We've got to find a different guide, for I don't stir a peg with Mr. Dick Percival!"

CHAPTER III.

LESTER RECEIVES A WOUND WHICH DETAINS HIM, AND HEARS BAD NEWS.

"YE'D better look out what yer sayin', Dan Budd," said a tall, gaunt man, who had just entered. "Dick Percival's my chum, an' the feller what slanders him's got ter talk ter me, fur I won't see him run down ahind his back."

"Ahind his back or afront o' it, I'm ready ter say what I durn please, an' stand to it, an' nuther you nor Dick Percival's goin' ter stop my doin' it. I say he ain't fit ter be trusted, an' I'll s'war to't an' you kin say what ye like 'bout not stan'in' it, fur ye can't help yerself."

"If ye say my pard's a bad un, ye've gotter say I'm another."

"So ye are, an' I wouldn't trust the two on ye as fur as I could chuck a grin'stone."

"What d'ye know agin us?"

"I knows ye fur reg'lar hoss thieves an' cutthroats, what 'ud rob a dead man, an' even a Injun wouldn't trust ye."

"Yer lie, ye lantern-jawed cuss, an' I kin—"

Crack!

Crack!

Smash!

Two shots and a clatter of falling glass followed each other in rapid succession, and then there was a free fight in which the principal participants were Dan'l and Dick Percival's champion, the latter getting rather the worst of it.

"I say—let's get out of here as quick as we know how," said Paul, "or we may get hit."

Two or three of the lights were put out, and the fight was getting so general and so desperate that about the best thing the boys could do was, indeed, to get out as soon as possible.

They accordingly made a dash for the door, and had almost reached it, when the remaining lights were extinguished, and the greatest hubbub ensued, everybody making for the door.

Numerous shots were fired in the dark, and many bad wounds were received in consequence, although one's aim could not be so good as in the light.

Suddenly, as the boys were nearly out, Lester Arnold uttered a cry of pain, and fell against Bert.

"I'm shot, boys!" he groaned. "In the leg, I think; and you'll have to get me away from this, for I can't walk."

Fortunately both the brothers were close to him, one on

either side; and as the door was opened just then, letting in considerable light from the street, they seized him in their arms, and darted out into the open air before any other damage could be done.

The night air revived Lester somewhat, but he was still rather weak, and the boys had to help him to the hotel, almost carrying him in their arms.

The wound was a bad one, one of the bones of the leg having been broken by the bullet, and the chances were that the poor boy—the originator of the plan—would have to give up the idea of the journey into the Black Hills.

An army surgeon happened to be stopping at the same hotel with the boys, and he set the broken leg, Lester having made it worse by falling at the time he received the shot, with one leg doubled under him.

The surgeon relieved the lad's pain, and made a neat job of the operation, so that Lester suffered none to speak of, but he was told that he could not stir for at least a month, and that would prevent his going with the boys.

He insisted upon their going, however, saying that it would worry him more to have them stay and lose their trip than it would to lose it himself.

"It won't do for me to worry, you know," he said, "for then I won't get well nearly so quick. Now you go off, and enjoy yourselves—find that treasure and bring it back, and you'll please me more than if you stayed behind. There's no use of my spoiling the whole thing. I shall be well taken care of, and when I am all right I will wait for you. I won't be able to travel until you get back, so I might as well wait for you. I can't be moved, anyhow, for a month, so you might as well go as not."

"You will fret at not being with us," said Bert.

"No, I won't, so just you go; I'm awfully sleepy now, so good night, and in the morning, do you get a good guide, and start off on your travels."

As Lester insisted that the boys should not give up their trip upon his account, they finally concluded to go, after seeing that he was in good hands.

Of course, Percival was out the question, and they at once set about procuring another guide, and in the morning had begun to make inquiries when word was sent that a guide named Tom Andrews wished to see them.

He was shown in, and proved to be a medium-sized man with black hair and eyes, a bad scar on his forehead, another down one side of his mouth, and a nervous, restless air.

He had his credentials with him, and was recommended by several English lords who had traveled with him, and by many others, and as he was said to be well acquainted with the country into which they were going, he was engaged at once.

He seemed desirous of setting out immediately, and as the boys themselves were nothing loth, the start was made at noon, after a cordial good-by to Lester.

The first point to be reached was Yankton, in the territory of Dakota, and thence the trail would be struck for the Black Hills direct, the boys promising to return in three months, by which time Lester would doubtless be able to go home with them.

The old diary was given to Paul, who promised to read it carefully, and observe all its directions. Lester's traps were left with him, excepting his revolver, blankets, and ammunition.

Horses were to be procured at a later stage in the journey, and Tom said he had already spoken for three good animals, having expected to take a couple of Englishmen out, but as they had disappointed him at the last moment, the horses would do for the present party.

Lester bade his chums good-by, and then settled himself down to the business of getting well; and with good nursing, absolute rest and quiet, he succeeded admirably, so that in even less than a month his leg had set and knitted beautifully, as the surgeon expressed it, and he was allowed to come down from his shelf, as he himself called it,

having been laid on a board with his leg in a plaster of Paris mould all this time.

He had a nice pair of crutches made, and was soon able to walk around a bit, frequently going out to ride also, and making himself as thoroughly contented and happy as was possible.

He wrote to his mother often, telling her not to worry, and that he would await the coming of his cousins.

Meanwhile she sent him many little luxuries, and plenty of good books to read, so that the time passed very rapidly.

It was about six weeks after the departure of the boys, when one day the clerk told him that an old scout named Dan Budd, and another man wished to see him.

They were shown to his parlor at once, and Lester recognized the old man who had first given him a true idea of Dick Percival's character.

"Mornin', my boyee," said the old scout. "Sorry ter see ye laid up, but I reckin ye're better off than yer friends. This are my fren', Tom Andrews, the scout."

CHAPTER IV.

STARTLING DISCLOSURES—TWO FAITHFUL FRIENDS—THE KEY TO THE PLOT.

WHEN Lester heard the name of the scout who had gone off with the boys, a terrible apprehension seized him.

"So soon returned?" he said. "What has happened? Where are my cousins?"

"Dunno," said the man, curtly.

"Were they captured by Indians?"

"Dunno."

"For Heaven's sake, tell me what is wrong!" cried the boy, in agony. "I know that there is something the matter. Speak, and tell me all."

"You remember what I was sayin' on that night in the Trapper's Roost, don't ye?" asked Dan.

"About Dick Percival?"

"H'm."

"I do; and it was on that account that my friends took another guide."

"Edzactly. They thort they tuk Tom Andrews, didn't they?"

"They did take him."

"'Scuse me, but they didn't. This is Tom Andrews himself."

"Explain."

"That ere's jest what I'm agoin' fur tu do. Tom Andrews, my old chum, war laid up that night, an' his papers was stole. It warn't him at all what went off wi' them lads, but some other feller."

"Well?"

"We only jest found out t'other day who it wur, and that you was still hyarabouts, an' I sez to Tom, sez I, we must go an' tell that lad all about this yer bizness, didn't I, Tom?"

"Yer right, my boy."

"An' that's w'y I come fur ter see ye an' tell——"

"For Heaven's sake, come to the point at once!" cried Lester, who was trembling with excitement, the heavy beads of perspiration standing upon his pale forehead.

"Who was the thief?"

"Dick Percival."

"My God! the very man we were afraid of. Did he go with the boys?"

"He did, fur a fack, so fur as we kin find out, fur he ain't been seen hyar sense, an' a feller has jest come in what said he met him wi' two young fellers in tow, headed fur the Black Hills, a month ago."

"Heaven preserve the two boys from that villain. He will rob and murder them."

"That's what I'm afeard on," said Dan, "fur Dick Percival has got a bad name. He knowed enuff not ter run acrost my trail, fur I'd shoot him on sight."

"What's to be done? I am afraid it's too late now," cried Lester. "Oh, dear, it's all my fault. They would not have gone only for me, and now they will never return. Most likely they are already dead, and this villain has plundered them. God have mercy on me for sending them away."

"Thar—thar, my lad, don't ye fret," said Dan. "Maybe it's not so bad as all that."

"But they had money, and expected to find more, and if they do, this man will kill them for it."

"What d'ye mean? They wasn't goin' huntin' fur gold, was they?"

"Yes," and the lad told the story of the treasure hidden under the lone pine.

"An' that ar *cache* wur made by Hank Hunt, my ole chum?"

"Yes."

"Then by darn, I'm goin' arter it, fur I know the very spot. I member now hearin' old Hank say as he wanted fur ter go off that way, an' never could do it. He used ter tell me about an army chap what he knowed, called Cap'n Arnold, what wur killed by Injuns, him an' his family, an' that's yer dad, I 'spose?"

"Yes."

"Then me an' Tom's a-goin' arter that yer gold, an' if Dick Percival's bin up ter any o' his games he ain't got long ter live; an' if them boys is still alive, we're the chap's what's goin' ter fotch 'em back."

"If you do, I'll give you a thousand dollars."

"We'd do it fur nuffin'."

"I know you would, but you must take something. I wish I could go with you, but it's no use, the fatigue would kill me. I will pay for your outfit. I have plenty of money, and must do something toward bringing those poor fellows back, if there is any chance at all of their being saved."

"If they're alive, we'll save 'em, sure pop, and if they're dead, we'll send that sneakin' cuss to whar it's red hot by the next express."

"You will go at once?"

"You kin jes' bet on that."

"And you will let me buy your outfit?"

"Waal, yes, mine an' Tom's, but nuthin' else. We'll git some fellows ter go wi' us when we git inter the mountings, a lot o' good fellers what knows the woods as well as a Injun, an' if the boys is dead we'll fotch back ther bodies, but I reckin that we may git thar in time. He won't go fur 'em right away, ye know, but'll wait till he gits inter the bad country where the Injins is thick, so's he kin blame it on ter them."

"God grant you may not be too late."

"So says I, my lad. Ye kin bet yer boots that me an' Tom 'll do all we kin, won't we, Tom."

"Yer bet yer life," answered the taciturn scout.

"That settles it. We'll be off afore ye kin say Jack Robison."

"And when I get stronger I will come on part of the way, and will wait for you in Yankton. I'll take it easy so as not to use me up."

"All right, my buck, the mounting air 'll do ye good. Don't ye fret now, an' if them boys is still livin' we'll fotch 'em home to yer as safe as eggs, or my name ain't Dan Budd."

While the search is going on, let us return to Mr. Sinclair, the step-father of the boys.

He has a letter locked up in his desk, which reads as follows:

"To SAM'L SINCLAIR, Esq., St. Louis.

"I have started with two of the lads. The other broke his leg and stayed behind. You don't care for him, anyhow, do you? If you do, I can finish him when I get back and earn my five hundred. He won't interfere with you, anyhow, 'cause he was the cousin. I had to leave in a hurry. They think I am Tom Andrews. They heard something bad about me, and swore they wouldn't have me. I

overheard them, and made up my mind I would go, anyhow. I will put them out of the way, so that they will never trouble you again, and no suspicion will attach to either you or

Yours truly, DICK."

What was Sinclair's motive for desiring to get rid of the boys?

Simply this:

If they lived they would inherit the greater part of their mother's property; but in case they died before coming of age, Mr. Sinclair would get it.

That was the motive—the love of gold, which is the root of all evil.

Lester did not stand in the way, but the villain was determined that he should share the fate of his cousins.

When he heard that the boy was safe, Mr. Sinclair bit his lip; but tapping his pocket, said, gayly:

"Let him live, then, if he wants to, for he cannot get any of the money. The other brats are safe, and the fortune is sure to be mine—and soon, too; for their mother will not long survive the sad news."

CHAPTER V.

MORE REVELATIONS, AND A STARTLING SUSPICION.

AROUND a pleasant little camp-fire, in the midst of the Black Hills, sat a party of three persons, partaking of their evening meal.

These three persons were our old friends, Paul and Herbert Stuart, and the villainous guide, Dick Percival, known to the boys as Tom Andrews.

The horses were quietly grazing, not far away, and near at hand was the rude shelter which protected the boys when it came on to rain, which it occasionally did among the hills.

Both boys were brown and rosy, being in excellent health, and as fat as bucks, the pure mountain air and outdoor life agreeing with them.

They had fished and hunted, scoured over mountain and plain, lived in all sorts of weather, and were excellent shots with both rifle and revolver, Paul being able to take the eye out of a grey squirrel at the top of the highest tree in the mountains.

They sadly missed Lester, for the lad was a bit of a wag, and had often amused them with his merry jests; but both had kept a journal, and when they returned, they intended to read him the account of their adventures, in order to make up for his disappointment in not having been with them.

They had not told Dick of the treasure hidden under the lone pine, but had spoken of wanting to go there, and Dick had promised to do so.

He had a particular motive in going there, for he knew that not far away was an encampment of Blackfeet Indians, with whom he was acquainted, and he meant to have these rascals sweep down upon the camp, and capture all hands.

The boys were to be sacrificed, and then he would make his escape and return to St. Louis with the sad tidings, receive his money and go off to concoct some new scheme of villainy.

That was his plan, and the time was close at hand for its execution, as at the end of another day the lone pine would be in sight, and he chuckled to himself that evening, as he smoked his pipe after supper, to think how easy the job would be done.

"I'll go and see if everything is all right," he said, at length, when the boys had finished their supper, and were chatting gaily together. "I won't be gone long. You'd better stay where you are, for there may be Indians about. I thought I saw signs of them this afternoon."

"All right, Tom," answered Paul, "we'll stay here, and anyhow I'm too tired to go any great distance."

"So am I," said Bert, "and if I don't drop off to sleep in ten minutes, it will be a wonder."

The man went away and then Paul said, suddenly:

"Bert, I have been reading that old journal of the trapper's, and find lots in it that Les never told us about."

"He said it was hard to read."

"So it is, but it is so very interesting that that soon wears off, and I can read it almost as well as print."

"What new things did you find out?"

"In the first place Les had a brother, who must have been a lad of five years when his father was killed, and consequently a year older than I."

"If he's living, you mean."

"It is not certain that he is dead, for the old hunter speaks of his having been taken away from his father by a party of white renegades."

"We never heard of this before. Les was supposed to be the only son."

"He was not with his father, and very likely our mother supposed that this other boy was killed at the same time that our uncle was."

"But old Hank must have died, or at least given this book to Lester's father some time before the latter was killed."

"Very likely, and therefore did not write down whether the boy was found or not. He speaks of a mark on the boy's arm, however, made by himself at the father's instance, by which he might be identified."

"What is it?"

"A sheaf of Indian arrows, surmounted by the letters, 'R. A.', which stand for Richard Arnold."

"Then if he is alive and we happened to meet him, we would know him?"

"Certainly."

"There isn't one chance in a hundred that he is alive, and not one in a thousand that we shall run across him if he is."

"I don't know about that."

"Nonsense, Paul, you are getting romantic."

"There is something else in this book, too, that interests us."

"What is it?"

"Dick Percival is supposed to be one of the men that carried the child away."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, and old Hank hated him worse than Satan, for he had frequently robbed him, and had hired a lot of savages to carry his wife away among the mountains, where she afterwards died from privation, fright and exposure."

"The miserable villain!"

"He swears vengeance against the man, and gives a description of him, so that whoever reads this book may know and shun the man, if they should ever meet him."

"Well, we've got rid of him, at all events. It was lucky we overheard that old fellow talking about him in Omaha."

"I am not altogether sure that we have got rid of him."

"What do you mean?" asked Bert, alarmed by the grave manner in which Paul uttered these words.

"Do you know that this description tallies in many respects with that of our guide?"

"Good Heaven!"

"Listen; this is what it says: Short, thickset, with bushy black hair, black eyes, nervous manner and an ugly scar down one side of his mouth."

"Good gracious! that is exact, as far as it goes, but the scar on the forehead—is nothing said about that?"

"No, and it was probably received afterwards. Suppose this should be Dick Percival."

"We must get rid of him at once."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUSPICION IS CONFIRMED.

"GET rid of him!" echoed Paul.

"Yes."

"What then?"

"Find this treasure, and then start for home as fast as we can travel."

"Nonsense! it would be utterly impossible to find our way back alone."

"Then we must run across somebody who is going back, and go with them."

"How many persons have we met in the last two weeks?"

"Not any."

"Which would intimate that we would not meet any for another two weeks if we started back."

"No it doesn't."

"What does it intimate, then?"

"That it's high time we did meet someone."

"They might not be agreeable companions when we did meet them."

"Anyhow, you are not sure that this fellow, Tom Andrews, as he calls himself, is Dick Percival."

"I am sure enough to cause me considerable alarm."

"There may be hundreds of fellows who are short, have black hair and eyes, and ugly scars on their faces."

"True, but there is something else."

"For goodness' sake, what is it?"

"If this man is really Dick Percival, he will have a deep scar upon his left shoulder, extending partly down his back, which was made by a tomahawk wound."

"Then we must make him strip off his shirt, I suppose, and expose his back to us, so that we may identify him."

"We must find out, in some way, whether he has such a mark."

"So we must; but how? Do you suppose he is going to let us do it quietly without making any fuss about it?"

"We can seize and bind him, and look for ourselves."

"And suppose he is not the man?"

"Then we can release him and apologize."

Bert broke into a hearty fit of laughter, and nearly rolled into the fire in his glee.

"What are you laughing at?"

"At you, to be sure. You are so bright in other things that I wonder you should say anything so funny as that. If he was the man we might possibly make him show us the way back until we met some one. We are armed and we might, I don't say we could, mind, make him take us back; but if he wasn't the man he would probably get mad and refuse to have anything more to do with us, even if he didn't shoot us."

"I am almost positive that he is the man, and that's what makes me so nervous about it. Besides, there is another way of identifying him."

"Good Heaven!" answered Bert, with another roar of laughter, "he might as well be ticketed: 'this is Dick Percival,' and done with it, if he has so many distinguishing marks about him. What is the next one?"

"The letters 'D.D.' on his right arm just above the elbow."

"He's a doctor of divinity, is he? I knew he was a hard case, but didn't suppose he was so bad as that," and Bert went into another laughing fit.

"Stop your laughing," said Paul; "the letters stand for his real name, Dan Duncan, so the book says."

"Oh, that's it. I thought, perhaps, he had deserted twice and been branded for it, as doctors of divinity don't usually have their cabalistic initials marked upon their persons, or at least, I never heard that they did."

"Sh! someone is coming," whispered Paul. "It is he, most likely."

It was the guide himself, and the boys chatted with him

just as merrily as if they did not suspect him of being a villain and a despicable renegade.

As yet they knew nothing of the plot set on foot by their step-father, and only dreaded Dick Percival because he had a bad name, and they knew not what crimes he might be capable of committing against them.

Had they known why Sinclair was so willing that they should go off upon this expedition, they never would have stirred a peg; but they did not know it, and here they were, hundreds of miles from home, in the very heart of the mountains, and in the power of a designing rogue, paid to have them put out of the way.

"You've never told us how you got that bad scar on your cheek, Tom," said Bert, at length. "Spin us a yarn, as they say at sea. I'd like to hear a good, first-class yarn to-night."

"H'm, I never like to say much about that," said the guide. "I got that scar in the toughest fight I ever was in."

"Do you mind telling us about it?"

"Well, no, I guess not, though it's not very lucky to talk about that fight."

"How so?"

"I never yet told that story but what the very next day, or soon afterwards, the Indians came down upon us, and it was nip and tuck to get away from them."

"Oho, that's the way, is it?"

"I never knew it to fail. But still, if you want to hear the story, I can tell it."

"All right, go ahead," said Bert, while Paul looked at him, and wondered what scheme was passing through his curly head.

"It happened some time ago," the guide began, "when a lot of us were up in this country. There was Dan Budd and Hank Hunt, and a lot more of us, all old chums, and one night the red imps came down upon us."

"Did they steal anybody's children?" said Bert.

Dick gave a start, but after a puff at his pipe proceeded with his story:

"No, we didn't have any with us. It was a nasty fight, I can tell you, and I had three of the wretches at me all at the same time. I crushed one fellow's head open when the other fellow gave me that gash on the side of the mouth."

"Did you kill him?"

"Yes, I did, and was stooping to scalp him—for an Indian believes he will never reach the happy hunting grounds if he is scalped—when the third fellow, whom I had forgotten, rushed upon me and aimed a nasty blow at my head with his tomahawk."

"That's what gave you that scar on your shoulder and back, wasn't it?" said Bert.

Dick started perceptibly and gazed earnestly at the lad.

"How did you know I had such a scar?" he asked.

"Ha-ha! he has got it and my suspicious are confirmed," thought Paul, though he said nothing, wondering how Bert was going to get out of his dilemma.

"Why, I saw it the other day when you were washing at that little brook in the mountains."

Bert had indeed seen the man, but he had not seen the scar, as Dick was generally careful not to expose it to view, and he cursed himself for having been so careless.

He did not suspect how adroitly the lad had discovered his identity, nor did he hear Bert whisper to Paul an hour later as they lay locked in each other's arms, evidently fast asleep, these words:

"You see, old boy, my way was the best after all. I have discovered Mr. Dick Percival; now to get out of his clutches as quick as possible."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSING CHILD FOUND—TREACHERY ON FOOT.

EARLY the next morning the two boys awoke and found the guide already up and stirring.

"We had better start for the lone tree at once," said Paul, "and after staying there a day hunting, I think we might as well make tracks for home. Our time is half up, and Les must be getting tired of waiting."

"Very well," said Dick, "if you want to go back, we will do so as soon as you please. The horses are in good shape to stand the journey."

"Let's go and see the pine tree, and if there is any good shooting we'll have some."

"Oh, there's excellent shooting," replied Dick, with an inward chuckle; "first-rate; once in a while the Indians come to the place and indulge in shooting, themselves, though their game is generally apt to be white hunters."

"You can reach the tree by night?"

"Yes, if we start now."

"Let us start, then."

"You want something to eat?"

"Yes."

The boys shot game enough for their breakfast, and after packing away upon their saddles what they did not use, started off towards the lone pine.

By noon they reached an elevation from which the tree could be seen, but both the boys knew well enough that they could not possibly reach it by night.

The evening shades began to gather while yet it was far off, and at last a halt was called in a little valley, watered by a stream, and preparations made for passing the night.

"It was further away than I thought," said Dick, "but we'll make it to-morrow at any rate. Light the fire, will you, and I'll go for more wood, and take care of the horses."

He went off and presently they heard the sound of his gun, and wondered at it, as he had said nothing about shooting anything.

Presently Paul heard a low whistle, and seizing his rifle, dodged behind a tree, expecting nothing but to see a brawny Indian jump out upon him.

Then he looked around for Bert and saw the latter kneeling by the fire with his rifle pointed at some object among the trees.

"Come out of there," said the lad, "or I'll pop you over."

To Paul's surprise, a lad, tall, brown and very handsome, dressed in tanned deerskins and having a rifle slung over his shoulder, advanced from the trees and held out his hand.

"I have come to warn you," he said, "not to harm you."

"By George, Paul, come here," shouted Bert; "did you ever see such a resemblance in your life?"

Paul stepped forward and gazed with a look of surprise at the lad, who did not seem to understand why he should have attracted so much attention.

"There's Injuns 'round yer, an' you'd better make tracks as soon as ye can," he said. "Old Pete an' me's got a cave over yonder, and if you want to come wi' me you can do so."

"Who are you?" asked Paul.

"Black Hill Dick, they call me. I've always lived about yer, though the Injuns have been making it hot fur us lately."

"Whom does he remind you of, Paul?" asked Bert.

"Of Les, to be sure."

"You've hit it. Do you remember what you told me last night?"

"I do."

"Now's the time to see if the boy is alive."

"By Jove, Bert, I never thought of that!"

"What's your other name, Dick?" asked Bert.

"My other name? I haven't any. I asked old Pete once, and he said he didn't know. He thought I must have had one once, he said, but when he found me among the Injuns and stole me away he had no idea whose child I was."

"Did he know who had made the marks on your arm?" said Bert.

The boy started and looked curiously at Bert, as if wondering how he knew so much.

"Do you know who my folks are?" he asked.

"I think so; roll up your sleeves and I'll tell you."

The boy exposed his arm, and there, on the white skin, just where Bert expected to find it, were the sheaf of Indian arrows, and the initials of Richard Arnold.

The lost child lived, and Les would meet his brother as well as his cousins when they returned.

"Hurrah, boys!" shouted Bert, throwing his coonskin cap in the air. "Give us your hand, Dick Arnold, the lost child of the Black Hills. I am your cousin, and so is this other fellow."

"Cousin? Have we the same blood?"

"Not a doubt of it, my lad. Your father married my father's sister, and two sons were born."

"Two? Where is the other?"

"In the east. Do you never remember living with white people, and having a father with a noble blue coat, and a horse, who used to ride you about, until one dreadful night there came an awful noise and smoke and fire, and you were carried away and never saw your kind father again?"

"My God!" exclaimed the lad, as the floodgates of his memory were opened, and incidents long forgotten came to mind. "I do—I do. I remember all this, as if it was a dream. Stolen by Indians, living with them for years, rescued by the old trapper who has taught me many things besides learning to hunt. Yes—yes, I remember it all. And you—you have come to take me to my father?"

"Would to Heaven we might," said Paul, with difficulty restraining his tears. "Your poor father is dead, killed in trying to recover you from the villains who had stolen you."

"The same night?"

"No, but afterward, some years afterward."

"And I had hoped to meet him some day, though old Pete said I wouldn't. My mother, is she alive?"

"No, she has been dead many years."

"Why did you come to tell me these things," cried the young man, in a flood of passion. "Why couldn't ye let me hope that one day I should see them."

"You have a brother living, and he will be glad to see you."

"He is your cousin?"

"Yes, and was with us when your poor father was killed. You are the exact image of him."

"You have been seekin' fur me?" asked the lad, who generally spoke well, but occasionally fell into the trapper's dialect.

"Yes, and he would have come, but for an accident. He broke his leg."

"Then I will go and set it for him; I know how, first rate. I've been as fur as Yankton, I have, and old Pete has taught me lots. I knowed how to set bones ever since I sot a young Indian's arm, oncet."

Bert laughed, and Dick laughed, too, not knowing what for, but because his companion did.

"Hark, some one is coming," he said, although the boys could not hear a sound. "You've got Dick Percival with you, did you know it?"

"Yes."

"Old Pete says he's bad, that he'd kill his own mother for a gallon of rum."

"I believe he would," said Bert, "if she was still living."

"Sh, he must not see me, for he hates me, tried to kill me once, but Pete stopped him. I'm not afraid of him now, but I don't want to see him. Stay awake to-night, and I'll come to you."

With that, the lad, so wonderfully discovered, darted away with the speed of a deer, and was lost to sight in a moment.

In a few moments Dick Percival returned, and when asked why he had been so long away, said that there were Indians about, and that they had shot at him.

Nothing more was said, and darkness soon settling down upon the place, the boys pretended to go to sleep, Percival saying that he would keep watch.

An hour later, as the fire smoulders and dies down, the man looks out from under the rim of his hat, and mutters to himself:

"They'll be here in another hour, and then my work will be finished!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRAFFICKER IN HUMAN LIVES—THE NIGHT ATTACK.

LET us explain why Dick Percival was gone so long when he went off early in the evening, with the avowed intention of finding wood for the fire.

Once out of sight he struck off across the hills, and in about half an hour came upon an Indian encampment or village, firing a shot as he entered it.

All the dogs, papooses, old women and boys immediately set up a howl such as was never before heard outside of a pandemonium, or what is the same thing, an Indian village.

Thrusting aside his noisy companions, he gave utterance to the cry of a night owl and strode toward the lodge of the chief, while the crowd fell back and allowed him to pass.

The hangings of the chief's lodge were thrown aside, and a tall, powerfully-built warrior appeared, and seeing the newcomer, strode forward to meet him.

"Why does the False Heart seek the lodge of Towering Pine?" asked the Indian, coming to the point at once. "Does he seek come new revenge upon the pale faces?"

"The Towering Pine has said it. The pale face offers gold and horses, the thunder sticks of the white man, and two tender victims for the stake."

"Only two? 'Tis not enough!"

"The price is enough for a hundred. Horses, weapons, provisions, blankets, all this for taking two lives; 'tis more than enough."

"Let the False Heart give the Towering Pine these things first, and then he will do as the False Heart wishes," said the wily savage.

Dick laughed boisterously, and then continued:

"Let him come and take what the white man offers him. There are but three, and the Towering Pine's warriors number ten times that. Come in the dead of night when everyone sleeps. Seize all and destroy the two whites. Show me that the wretches are dead, and more will be added to what has already been promised."

"Does the False Heart wish his enemies killed at once, or does he want them to die a lingering death—a death of torture?"

"That's just it. I want to see the brats suffer. Burn 'em at the stake; make their deaths as horrible as you can invent."

"Where is the camp of the pale faces?"

"Over the hill, in a little vale where the stream murmurs by, and the shadow of the lone pine tree is thrown at sunset over the scene. Two white lads repose there in sweet seclusion. At the dead of night do you come down with your warriors, and, with horrid cries, rush upon the sleeping camp, seize everything, and drag the prisoners to the lone pine."

"To the lone pine?"

"Ay, for the white boys wish to see it. Let their last gaze on this earth be riveted upon that, as the flames roar around them. You will do my wishes?"

"It shall be done, and the False Heart shall depart in safety; but let him never again come to the Towering Pine on such an errand, or on any errand; for if he does, the Indian will not answer for his life."

"So-ho, you're getting squeamish, eh, about killing whites?"

"Not so. But the Towering Pine hates killing in cold blood. When the white man invades his land, and seeks to drive him out of it, then he will kill all and spare not. The knife, the fire, the tomahawk are here for the whites then, but to slay two boys sleeping, Towering Pine hates it!"

"Tell that to old women and children who have no sense!" laughed Dick, scornfully. "I know that you like nothing better than to do these sly jobs that I give you; but if you only kill from revenge, listen."

"The Towering Pine is silent."

"These lads have the same blood in their veins as the terrible blue-coat, Major Arnold; he you called the Thunder Cloud; he who slew so many of your people, and whom you killed. These lads are of his kin. Will you let them live?"

"Never! The Towering Pine will fall upon and crush them, and so finish the destruction of a hated race. But let the False Heart heed the warrior's warning. If ever again he sets foot in these wilds, he dies!"

"Miserable savage, do you dare threaten me?" cried Dick, his hand upon his pistol.

"The Towering Pine does not threaten; he only warns."

"Very well, as you please. I can't afford to quarrel with you now, and when this job is finished I sha'n't care to come this way again, it isn't likely. You will do as I have told you?"

"The False Heart has said it."

"Then that's all right. I will expect you at midnight."

Then he strode away and reached the camp in due season, the boys being so excited with what they had just discovered that they did not notice that the villain had brought nothing.

The camp was clothed in silence, Dick himself having fallen asleep, when the stillness was broken by the cry of a night bird of some ill-omened species.

Then there was a quick rustle, and a boyish form rushed into the little camp, and seized Paul by the shoulder.

"Wake up—wake up," he whispered; "the Indians are approaching!"

Paul awoke, but for a moment could not understand what had been said.

Then there came a terrible shout and the report of firearms, and a score of dusky forms swarmed around, while Dick Arnold fired half a dozen shots in rapid succession, and dashed off into the darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

BETRAYED BY MAN AND SAVED BY THE VENGEANCE OF HEAVEN.

THE boys both sprang to their feet and seized their rifles which had been kept loaded, and hearing shots, fired upon the advancing Indians.

Both had revolvers, and they emptied them among the savages, killing two or three of the wretches; but before they could reload the swarming horde bore down upon them and made them prisoners.

Then they dragged the lads off, seizing everything they could lay hands upon, unfastening the horses and loading them with the spoils.

Percival was a prisoner, but that was only for effect, so that the boys would not suspect him until the proper time came, of having betrayed them.

Half naked, their hands fastened tightly behind them and their feet unshod, the poor boys were dragged through the trees and over rough rocks until they thought they should die from exhaustion.

After a long tramp the party halted, and the lads were thrown upon the bare, cold ground, with no covering over them, the cruel thongs cutting into their flesh, and their

bodies bleeding from numerous wounds received during the rough passage through the woods.

It was impossible to sleep, for the red devils had broken into the store of liquors taken by the boys to use in case of sickness or rattlesnake bites, and were fast becoming intoxicated, their cries sounding like the howls of so many wild beasts.

To and fro they reeled, shouting and laughing, pouring the liquor down their throats by the pint, and never ceasing until every drop had been consumed, and then cursing because there was no more.

A fire was built, but the boys were not allowed to enjoy it, the savages dancing and capering about until one by one they fell to the ground in a drunken sleep.

Percival alone remained sober, and he kept a watch upon the boys to see that they did not escape, throwing extra fuel upon the fire, from time to time, so that there would be light enough to prevent any efforts upon their part to get away.

At last the morning dawned, the day promising to be tempestuous, and after sleeping off the effects of their debauch, which took them until nearly noon, the savages made a breakfast, and then started for the lone pine, which they reached in about an hour.

Then began the preparations for the torture.

Two stakes were set in the ground at a distance of about twenty feet from the tree, and the boys, stripped stark naked, were tied to them by thongs of buffalo hide.

"Heaven help us!" murmured Paul. "Is there no one near to aid us?"

"Percival is free!" said Bert, "and is giving these fiends directions. He has betrayed us, the heartless scoundrel!"

The savages began piling dry wood all around the poor boys, until their breasts were reached, and at that moment Percival advanced and said, scornfully:

"You thought you had got rid of Dick Percival, didn't ye? I am Dick Percival myself, and your Tom Andrews is nowhere about."

"We found out who you were too late," said Paul. "We know you for a villain, and do not wonder that you should have betrayed us to these savages."

"Oh, you don't?" laughed the human fiend. "That's a comfort, at all events. You complained of being cold last night. You'll be warm enough now, I fancy!"

"Why have you done this? What have we done to you?" asked Bert.

"Nothing, as I know of."

"Then this is not done for revenge?"

"Not mine; no."

"Whose vengeance do you execute upon us?"

"I might as well tell you, I suppose," answered the brute, with a laugh, "for you can't help yourselves. Your kind and loving step-father hired me to get you out of the way, and I might have done it a hundred times, only I thought I would let you enjoy yourselves a little longer."

"Wretch! do you expect to go unpunished for this?" demanded Paul, with flashing eyes.

"I don't know who is going to punish me. The Indians won't and no one else will know anything about it."

"Then I appeal to Divine aid to avenge our murder!"

cried Paul, raising his eyes to the sky, now darkened by the approaching tempest.

"Ha-ha! you may well call on Heaven to aid you, for nothing else can, and that won't!" roared Percival with an oath.

The faggots were all ready, and an Indian stood ready at each pile with a lighted torch in his hand, awaiting the signal to fire the piles.

Raising his eyes toward a rift in the clouds, Paul shouted in his agony:

"If there is a just Power above that witnesses this crime, I cry for His vengeance upon this murderer, worse than the wild savages. My God! is there no help at hand?"

As if in answer to his frenzied appeal, a tremendous clap of thunder was heard, followed instantly by a flash so fierce, that it seemed to rend the very foundations of the heavens.

"We are answered," said Paul, gravely. "Villain, your doom is not far off; the punishment of Heaven will soon fall!"

"Set fire to the wood and silence these brats forever!" shouted Percival, with a blood-curdling oath.

The torches were applied, and the flames began to crackle and snap around the devoted boys.

If help is indeed at hand, there is no time to lose; for in another moment it will be too late.

"Ha—ha! Where is your divine interference now?" laughs the renegade.

He received an instantaneous reply.

At that moment the tempest broke, and, as if the very flood-gates of Heaven were opened, the rain poured down in one blinding sheet of water.

The flames were instantly extinguished, while the water threatened to undermine the stakes.

Percival ran to the shelter of the tall pine and stood close against its trunk.

"Tear the hearts out of the young wildcats!" he yelled. "Scatter their brains upon the ground. We shall see about this boasted aid. Do as I bid, this instant!"

A dozen savages rushed up to carry out his fiendish order, and a dozen tomahawks were poised in air, ready to be buried in the brains of the poor boys, when suddenly the power of Heaven to punish crime and rescue the unfortunate was startlingly realized.

A crash of thunder, so loud that it seemed to shake the earth, broke upon the ear and made every listener pause.

It was accompanied by a living fire, a blinding, dazzling body of flame, from which the eyes recoiled in pain.

A hissing, spitting, crashing noise was heard, and a ball of fire struck the tall pine, shivered it from top to bottom, and tore up the ground around within a radius of many feet.

There was a cry of horror from the savages, and Dick Percival, his face blackened and grimed, his eyes protruding from his head, his tongue paralyzed, and his teeth set and rigid, fell to the earth a ghastly corpse.

Paul's appeal for justice had not been made in vain.

The vengeance of outraged Heaven had fallen, the wretch had died with all his sins upon his head.

He had been struck by lightning, the shelter he had sought proving his doom.

"It is the will of the Great Spirit," cried the terrified Indians, dropping their uplifted weapons.

Then with one accord they fled in all directions, leaving the dead body of the renegade lying with its bloodshot eyes to the sky, and its hands clutched convulsively as in the agonies of a terrible death.

And still the pitiless rain, as if sorry for the good it had done, poured down upon the unprotected heads of the two boys, while the blasted pine, reaching one tall, gaunt finger to Heaven, stood as a monument above them, telling to coming generations of the terrible vengeance of Heaven.

CHAPTER X.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN DICK TO THE RESCUE—OLD PETE FIGHTS HIS LAST FIGHT.

DRENCHED and chilled through by the rain, the boys remained tied to the stakes until night came on, and with it no prospect of release, the Indians not having dared to return to the spot where they had seen the terrible punishment of the false guide.

Presently a new horror made itself known.

The barking of wolves was heard, the sound growing louder each moment, and echoing and re-echoing through the distant woods.

The tree stood upon the side of a hill where there was no other shelter for many hundred feet, and if anyone had been approaching they could have been seen for quite a distance.

The wolves soon hove in sight, and the poor lads felt that they had been saved from the Indians only to be eaten by those savage beasts whose cries were dreadful to hear.

They came scampering up the hill, snapping and barking, and tumbling over each other, their glowing eyes shining amid the darkness, and their savage leaps bringing them every instant nearer to their victims.

With one mad rush they leap forward, and the wet wood is scattered on every hand as they seek to fasten their cruel teeth into the bodies of the trembling boys.

Bert utters a shriek of such terrible agony that even the wolves are startled by it and retreat a few steps in alarm, waiting a moment before they prepare to make a second rush.

Just at that last fatal moment a shout is heard, and a lad, waving a torch over his head, runs up and throws the flaming brand into their very midst.

Then, with another shout, he fires shot after shot into the snarling, yelping pack, which soon scatters in all directions.

"Thank Heaven I have come in time!" he says, rushing up to the boys, cutting their bonds, and giving them a few drops of brandy apiece.

"God help me for being so late!" he said. "It might ha' been fatal. The blamed red varmints haven't left ye a rag to cover ye, have they? It's too blasted bad! But never mind; I'll fix you out."

It is needless to say that the boy was Dick Arnold, who had kept upon the track of the Indians, and had not discovered, until nearly too late, that the boys had been left in the shadow of the blasted pine.

"I stole back your horses from those brutes," he said, "and they're down there in the bushes. I've got a couple o' blankets, and they will keep you warm until we get to old Pete's. Come along, fur them confounded coyotes may come back."

* * * * *

"You say that there is gold hidden at the root of the blasted pine?"

"There was once, and we have no reason to suppose that it has been taken away."

It was the morning following that terrible night, and our two chums, provided with warm clothes and weapons, their own horses carefully hidden away in Dick's stable, fully recovered from the exposure of the previous night, and once more in excellent spirits, were talking with Dick about their object in having come to this place.

"Let's go and see if it is there," said Dick.

"And when we find it, will you go back with us to your brother?"

Dick looked at the old trapper, who sat in one corner of the hut, smoking.

"I can't bear to leave him," he said, quietly. "He has been a father and a mother both to me."

Old Pete heard him and looked up.

"Don't mind the old boy, Dick," he said. "'Tain't right as ye should allers stay out yer in the mountings; an', 'sides that, suthin' tells me that I ain't got much longer fur ter stay on this yearth. Go wi' 'em, Dick, my darlin'; go wi' em. I'se glad you've found yer own kin—mighty glad. I knowed ye would; I allus said so, an' I tried ter find 'em for ye."

"I cannot bear to leave you, Pete; it don't seem right; I do want to go and live with my own people, fur the plains isn't the city, by a good deal. But I won't go as long as you are alive."

"How's the young gentlemen tu git back, if ye don't go with 'em? They's got to go hum, an'll want a guide."

"Well—well, Pete, I'll go some time, of course, and you'll laugh to see us three boy scouts settin' out, but don't send me away yet. Let me get used to the idee o' leavin' you. Paul and Bert can't go alone, of course, an' I'll go with em', only I'd like to wait a few days."

"We are in no hurry," said Paul, "and can wait a week if you like. Why can't Pete go with us?"

"I war born out yer in the wilderness, honies," he said, removing his black pipe from his mouth, "an' I spect ter die yer; I can't live in the cities, nor where the houses are less'n five mile apart. Don't worrit about me; I ain't got but a few days tu live. Somethin's agoin' tu happen what no one kin help, an' then I'll be out o' the way."

"Don't talk like that, Pete," said Dick.

The next day, the three boy scouts, as they called themselves, saddled their horses, and rode off to the blasted pine, to look for the gold.

They had one old shovel and a pickax belonging to Pete, and that was all they did have, but they intended to do the best they could under the circumstances.

When they reached the tree, Paul shuddered as he pointed to a small pile of human bones lying close to the blasted tree, whose every branch had withered, the terrible

force of the electric fluid as it passed down having blighted all life and killed the tree from top to bottom.

"The wolves have polished his bones," said Bert; "such a fate ought to be a warning to all men who bargain in human lives."

To the boys' great surprise, the same bolt that had killed the tree and Dick Percival at one stroke, had also laid bare the treasure of the old trapper, and scarcely any digging was necessary.

Dick was astonished to think that so much wealth should have lain here so long and he know nothing about it, and his eyes fairly glistened as the treasure was brought out.

The boys made three packages of the find, and one was put upon each horse, after which, slinging their rifles across their shoulders, the three boy scouts set out for the hidden ranch of the old trapper.

It was almost night, and they had nearly reached the place, when they were startled by the sound of firearms, shouts and fiendish yells.

"I'll bet a hat that the Injuns have attacked the old man while out doors," said Dick. "Hurry, boys, hurry, and let's give the red cusses a lesson!"

All three put spurs to their horses and dashed off with the speed of the wind, the cries and shots appearing to increase.

In a few moments they came upon a little valley, at one end of which was the hidden home of the old trapper and his young friend.

A startling sight met the gaze of the three boy scouts.

The old man, with his back placed against a rock, was striking right and left with his clubbed rifle, his ammunition having been exhausted, while a score of dusky foes were trying to overpower him.

Half a dozen of the Indians lay dead upon the sward, and as many more were binding up their bruised heads or trying to stanch the blood that flowed fast from ugly wounds given them by the aged trapper.

With a ringing shout, the boys discharged their weapons at the savages, and the latter, thinking that maybe there were more behind, so rapidly did the lads send the bullets whizzing around them, that they made their way off as if all the bad spirits were after them.

The ugliest-looking one of the whole party, evidently determined to do as much mischief as he could, sent his tomahawk whizzing through the air, striking the poor old man square in the forehead, and stretching him upon the sod at the foot of the rock.

Dick saw the act, and fired at the painted demon before he had a chance to escape.

The bullet struck him in the back of the head, passing clear through the brain, and causing instant death.

Without even a howl of pain on his lips, the savage rolled over backwards, breaking his neck and landing all in a heap at the bottom of the bank.

The other Indians departed hastily, and the three lads were left alone.

Dick rushed up to the old man, but there was nothing that could be done except to bury him quietly among his native hills.

He was dead.

"Boys," said Dick, "the poor old man has been wiped out. I am ready to go with you now!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE THREE BOY SCOUTS START FOR HOME.

THERE was not much time to be lost, for it was very likely that the Indians, having once discovered the place—the ranch had been broken into—would return in greater numbers, and render it untenable.

"I hate to bury the poor old man while his body is yet warm," said Dick, "but we've got to do it, and put him where those red imps won't dig him up, either."

At one end of the valley was a narrow opening between two boulders, along which one had to pass to enter the cave, the entrance to which was guarded by another boulder, which was so nicely balanced that it could be turned back and forth by a slight motion of the hand.

Once remove it from its pivot, and ten men could not move it; a single sharp blow at the bottom would cause it to fall into a natural cavity in the supporting rock, whence it could not be moved by any ordinary force.

Dick raised the body of the old trapper, intending to place it in the cave, and then close the place for ever, deeming that the best place for the last abode of his old comrade would be where he had spent so many years.

The boys carried the body to the opening, and Dick was about to pass through when he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and darted back as a tomahawk went flying through the air, close to his head.

"There's an Indian in there," he said, "waiting for me. I'll fix him."

Holding the body erect before him, the lad advanced and passed into the cave, the stone being shoved aside.

He had a revolver in one hand ready to use upon the slightest occasion, and as he laid the old man's body down upon a couch always occupied by him, the Indian, who had been hiding behind a pile of furs, jumped to his feet and sprang at Dick.

The lad fired one random shot, which cut the feathers from the redskin's top-knot, and caused him to halt momentarily.

In that instant Dick sprang through the opening, turned the stone upon its pivot so as to close the aperture, and then catching up Pete's pick, which Bert had brought with him, he struck the bottom of the boulder a tremendous blow.

A wedge of stone as thick as his wrist and about four inches wide and six long, was shivered from the boulder, which immediately settled down with a crunching noise into its rocky bed.

"Ha-ha, that boxes him up," said Dick. "There's no getting out of there, now, until the day of judgment."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul, in surprise.

"Try to move that stone with me, all three of us."

The three lads pushed with all their might upon the boulder, but could not stir it an inch.

The imprisoned Indian seemed to be trying to push it back, also, and presently set up a great howl, asking to be released.

"I can't do it," said Dick, adding, in a graver tone than usual: "That cave is his tomb. He would have killed me. I have buried him alive. Fortunately, he has weapons, and can take his own life."

"What a horrible fate!" said Paul, under his breath.

"No more horrible than the death they would have given you, boys," answered Dick. "Come! the time is passing; we must get out of this just as quick as we can scratch. Jump on your horses and follow me."

* * * * *

Over the hill rode the three boy scouts, the blasted pine standing out in bold relief against the sky for many miles, reminding the boys of the most terrible event of their lives, and one which they would not soon forget.

They rode until darkness put a stop to their progress; but long before sunrise the next morning they were up and away, and rode all day long, with the exception of about two hours in the hottest portion.

After this, considering themselves well out of the reach of the Blackfeet—supposing they had cared to follow—the journey was made at more leisure.

Dick taught the boys many things which they had never dreamed of, and before a week they were more schooled in woodcraft than they had deemed it possible for them to be.

"That miserable guide never told us anything about those things," said Bert; "or, at least, not a quarter of what you have."

"He was afraid to; for he meant to kill you, or have you killed, and he didn't want ye to know too much," answered Dick.

At the end of a week the lads ran across a party of tourists whose guide had fallen down a precipice and killed himself, and who were vainly endeavoring to find their way back to civilization with not the least success.

Dick offered the services of himself and cousins, and the offer being accepted, the three boy scouts put themselves at the head of the party, astonishing all hands by their cleverness.

It was an advantage on both sides, for one had trustworthy guides and the other a strong escort, numbers counting for a great deal among the Black Hills.

We have not space to describe the return journey in detail; suffice it to say that many exciting adventures were met with, such as an occasional brush with the Indians; the fording of a rapid torrent, during which Paul came within an inch of being swept away, and was only saved by the coolness and presence of mind of his Cousin Dick; an attack by miners, who thought the party intended to "jump" a claim they had left for a few days, in which affair both Bert and Paul showed great bravery, and a dozen others equally exciting.

One day, when close upon the borders of civilization, a party of scouts was seen approaching, and when they came up Paul was surprised to find the old trapper, Dan Budd, whom he had first seen in Omaha.

"Lord bless ye!" said the old man, "we've been huntin' all over the blessed old country fur ye," said the trapper, "an' was afeerd Dick Percival had got the better o' ye."

"You will find Dick's bones bleaching under the shad-

ow of the blasted pine," said Bert. "He was struck down by the hand of God and punished for his many crimes."

"White men will be a durned sight better off for that," said Dan. "Tellee what, lads, the other boy's as fat as a buck wi' waiting fur ye, an' he kin walk 'most as good as he could afore. He'll be tarnal glad ter see ye, ye kin bet."

"We've got a surprise for him," said Bert, laughing.

The tourists having reached civilized parts again, the boys determined to let them get some other guides, and so turned them over to Dan and his chum, while they made all possible haste homeward.

* * * * *

"God bless you, boys! you're safe back at last. I nearly worried my head off when I found out that Dick Percival had cheated us so nicely."

This was the greeting Les gave his cousins as he shook them warmly by the hand in the "Trappers Roost," having returned to Omaha to await the boys' coming.

Then seeing Dick with the others, he gave a start and looked puzzled.

"I've seen you before, haven't I?" he asked.

"Quite likely."

"You didn't read that old book of yours very closely, I fancy," said Paul to Les, "or you would have discovered that you had a brother once who was stolen by outlaws."

"My God! your mother has told me something of this, but only to me alone."

"That boy, your brother, lives, and is called Dick Arnold. We found him off there in—"

"Thank Heaven! I knew there was something familiar about your face," said Les, turning to Dick. "God bless you, I could hug you for turning up like this. Now I can have a brother as well as Paul or Bert."

"This is my brother you spoke of?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven! Shake, my lad!"

The shake was the warmest, closest, heartiest embrace that ever two human beings ever gave one another, and it seemed to Bert as if the two brothers had turned into bears and were trying to hug each other to death.

At last when the mutual greetings were over with, it was determined to make the start for home, taking Dick along.

Les was told the story of Percival's treachery and terrible death, of Sinclair's villainy and of the perilous journey home, and then a council of war was held to determine what had best be done.

Paul suggested that they make Mr. Sinclair believe them dead, and then suddenly appear before him, and accuse him of having plotted against their lives.

This was approved of, and two letters were written, one to the villain presumably from Percival, announcing the death of the boys, and asking that the money be sent to him at once, and the other to the mother acquainting her with the full particulars of their miraculous escape, together with an account of how Dick had been discovered.

* * * * *

Mrs. Sinclair was sitting in her boudoir one evening before dinner, when her husband entered with a letter in his hand.

"I have received very sad news, my dear," he said, "the boys will be delayed, I fear."

"What has happened? I know it is something dreadful!" said the lady, with well simulated terror.

"The boys have been—"

"Not killed by the Indians? Don't say that!"

"Yes. It is a terrible blow to me; I never wanted to let the boys go, although I seemed perfectly willing. Poor fellows, their bodies were not even recovered, and the guide barely escaped with his life."

"Tell me all about it."

Thereupon the false-hearted step-father gave the full details of how the boys had strayed away beyond the confines of the camp, contrary to the guide's warning, and had been cut off by Indians.

The account was purely fictitious, of course, and made up as the narrator told it, but was listened to with a great deal of interest by the fond mother, who did not weep as much as she might have been expected to do.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Why didn't the guide come himself, instead of writing?"

"He didn't want to take us by surprise, because if he had come alone we should have known at once that something was wrong."

"He will come, then, soon?"

"No."

The villain had not answered the question, and seemed as much startled as his wife.

The word had been spoken by a boy, and before Sinclair had recovered from his surprise, the door behind the lady was thrown open, and in walked Lester and Dick.

"Ah, Les, I am very glad you did not go with your cousins," said the wretch. "Who is your friend?"

"My brother, Mr. Richard Arnold."

"I thought he died when a child."

"He did not, and the proofs are positive that he is the very boy we have mourned so long."

"I know him to be so," said the lady, embracing the

former boy scout, who looked a very different person in his elegant summer suit than when arrayed in buckskin garments.

"Did you say the guide would not come?" asked Sinclair of Les.

"I did."

"Why will he not?"

"Because his bones lie bleaching on the hillside, under the shadow of the blasted pine; because the hand of God smote him and took away his life so long devoted to crime. 'Twas a just ending for him, and do you beware also, for your evil purposes are known and thwarted, your would-be victims live, and are here to confront you with your crime. Behold!"

The door flew open and the two brothers entered, hand in hand.

"Not dead!" shrieked the villain. "Has the villain then failed to do my bidding?"

"He has, base plotter against our lives," said Paul, advancing. "We know your secret, the traitor revealed it to us, supposing there was no escape. You have sought to kill us, but the scheme has failed. Beware how you conduct your—"

The lad suddenly ceased, as with a wild shriek and a gasp for breath, Sinclair fell heavily to the floor.

He had probably fallen in an apoplectic fit, the excitement having been too much for him.

The boys ran to his assistance, but nothing could be done to save him.

He was dead!

It was not altogether apoplexy that had killed him, for in his hand was found a small vial containing a deadly poison.

Unseen by the boys, he had quickly swallowed enough of the fatal drug to cause instantaneous death, being unwilling to be known as one who had plotted to take another's life.

"He is dead, slain by his own hand," said Paul, solemnly, "and has gone to join the wretch who met his death by Heaven's own hand at the foot of the BLASTED PINE."

[THE END.]

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